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Pragmatism: Exploring Black Studies and Multiculturalism in Higher Education

Earnest N. Bracey

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“In the final analysis, we must understand that a heterogeneous culture defies any attempt to codify an American ‘canon’ of essential learning.”

From the outset we must ask the question: Should educators and academics include the study of Multiculturalism and Black Studies fully in the core college curriculum, rather than accepting a totally eurocentric core? In other words, can there be a balance in the subjects (or new disciplines) that we teach at the university and higher educational levels? Toward this end, it is important to recognize that recent multicultural ideas must be embraced for the sake of learning as well as teaching (the canon) of Great Works.

Some educators, however, argue that our nation's cultural and ethnic diversity makes it impossible to construct a core curriculum for all students and schools. Nonetheless, we must incorporate the modern-day multicultural works in order for us to be more effective and equal in our pedagogy. Furthermore, we must inquire: Does knowledge of multiculturalism limit our experiences and knowledge about the world? Indeed, if we are limited in what we can ask, does this stifle our ability to learn new and creative ways of thinking, which would allow us to bring a positive sense of challenge and wonder to the canon of scholarship?

Such provocative questions are enough to, perhaps, launch many intense debates; however, because there are many cultures and minorities in the United States, the principles of multiculturalism and diversity are essential for equality, justice and a multi-racial democracy. Thus, separate education and a dismissal of multiculturalism is not the answer. It is, therefore, extremely important to understand that we must oppose (or reject) the impulse to separate ourselves, especially at the higher education level, because the only way that we can survive as a sovereign and free nation is by integration and unification at all levels of our society.

In the final analysis, we must understand that a heterogeneous culture defies any attempt to codify an American "canon" of essential learning. But is this really necessary? One must be cognizant that without such new works and disciplines as Black Studies and other multicultural efforts at the university level, minorities who attend these elite institutions will continue to be concerned, suspicious and less trusting of the dominant culture.

PRESENTER:

Earnest N. Bracey is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, with over 20 years of active military service. He was commissioned through Reserve Officer Training (Distinguished Military Graduate) at Jackson State University, where he graduated with honors (Magna Cum Laude), and received his B.A in Political Science, in 1974. He also received an M.A. in Public Administration, in 1979, from Golden Gate University and one in

International Affairs from Catholic University of America in 1983. He earned his doctorate of Public Administration (with emphasis in Public Policy), in 1993, from George Mason University. Dr. Bracey serves as Nevada's chairperson for the National Association of African-American Studies, and currently teaches political science and Black American History at the Community College of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas. His work has appeared in professional journals and other publications, and he co-authored the book "American Politics and Culture Wars" (1997). His book, "Prophetic Insight: The Higher Education and Pedagogy of African American" (1999), was recently published by the University Press of America.